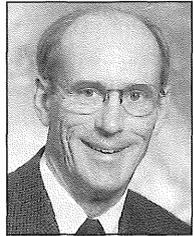


Lawmaker's agenda built on northern economic concerns

By Paul Wahl

Each Sunday, Rep. Larry Howes (R-Hackensack) leaves his home in the quiet woods of northern Minnesota and journeys to the din and hubbub of St. Paul to represent the people of District 4B.



Rep. Larry Howes

He brings with him a great awareness of the voters he represents, and he also brings along a belief in common sense and fundamental values.

"I'm just an average guy doing an average job," said Howes, who has been involved in Republican politics for the past decade.

Among his credits are a stint as chair of the 8th Congressional District for U.S. Sen. Rod Grams' campaign and a variety of political jobs to which he attributes a great number of blisters on his feet.

"I've worked parade routes in 50 percent of the towns in the 8th Congressional District for one candidate or another," Howes said.

Last year, when party leaders began to look for a House candidate from Howes' district, he initially did not even consider running because he was the district's party chair. But when no viable candidate came forward, Howes said he'd run if the people encouraged him.

They did. He did. And he won.

"I think really the reason I won is that I didn't try to pretend to be someone I wasn't,"

Howes said. "I pretty much told people what you see is what you get. I'll come down here as a freshman, but I don't believe I'll be a rookie."

Howes said all his years working for the party prepared him for what the legislative process entails.

"It's taken me less time to understand the majority process than the incumbents—nothing against the incumbents," he said. "It's just that for so long they've been in the minority, so they tend to feel they need to talk incessantly to get their bill passed when all they have to do is sit down, shut up, and vote."

Howes serves on the House Commerce Committee, Health and Human Resources Policy Committee, and the environment and natural resources finance and policy committees.

Representing his district means working on bills that impact its three major endeavors: tourism, hunting, and logging.

"I believe Cass County is the lowest county in the state with regard to manufacturing jobs," Howes said. "In fact, it's one of the lowest in the country."

Tourism in Cass County consists primarily of mom-and-pop resorts. Howes has worked on several proposals aimed at providing tax relief and extending the number of days resorts can operate and still qualify for a reduced property tax rate.

The district also has a large number of hunters, so he's sponsoring a bill that would offer a lifetime hunting and fishing license.

Howes is also trying to convince his fellow legislators to increase state funding for the Mississippi Headwaters Board, which oversees issues relating to the river's northernmost 400 miles.

He explained that the river is under federal jurisdiction, but the U.S. Forest Service has allowed this board to take the lead in a variety of environmental issues.

"They're watching us to see how we do the job," Howes said. "As long as we continue to do a good job, they'll stay out of there. Anytime the locals can do the job, the big guy doesn't have to come to town."

So far, Howes has found his work in the House challenging, but he said the quality of the staff, both partisan and nonpartisan, has lightened the load and earned his respect.

"Just because you author a bill doesn't make you a hero, doesn't make you important," Howes said. "It simply means you're the vehicle for all these wonderful people who work down here to do their job. And if they do their job well, your bill gets passed and it helps the people of your district."

District 4B

1995 population: 35,734

Largest city: Park Rapids

Counties: Itasca, Cass, Hubbard, Wadena

Location: north-central Minnesota

Top concern: "I am here representing 35,000 people. That's why I'm here. They've called on me to vote for them, and that's what I'm doing."

— Rep. Larry Howes

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